Outcomes from the review of the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS)

Changes planned for ASGS Edition 4 (2026)

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Overview

The Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) is a classification of Australia into a hierarchy of statistical areas developed for the release and analysis of statistics and other data, at a local or regional level. The ASGS is updated every 5 years to account for growth and change in Australia's population, economy, and infrastructure. The first edition was released in 2011 replacing the previous Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC).

ASGS Edition 4 will be progressively released from July 2026 to July 2030. In preparation, the ABS undertook public consultation (https://consult.abs.gov.au/geospatial-solutions/asgs-edition-4-consultation/) , and a review of feedback received from stakeholders since the release of ASGS Edition 3 (https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/australian-statistical-geography-standard-asgs-edition-3/jul2021-jun2026) in July 2021. The ABS used this information to inform future ASGS design decisions, with a focus on the updates required for ASGS Edition 4 which will facilitate the release of the 2026 Census of Population and Housing.

This publication outlines changes planned for ASGS Edition 4.

Summary of Changes

Key changes for ASGS Edition 4 are the following:

- Urban Centres and Localities (UCL) will be designed using Mesh Blocks rather than Statistical Area Level 1 (SA1).
- The Remoteness Structure will continue to be designed in the same way as previous editions of the ASGS.
- Australian Drainage Divisions (ADD) and Tourism Regions (TR) will be removed from the Non ABS Structure but will be supported through correspondences (https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/australian-statistical-geography-standard-asgs-edition-3/jul2021-jun2026/access-and-downloads/correspondences) and allocation files (https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/australian-statistical-geography-standard-asgs-edition-3/jul2021-jun2026/access-and-downloads/allocation-files) .
- Digital boundary files (https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/australian-statistical-geography-standard-asgs-edition-3/jul2021-jun2026/access-and-downloads/digital-boundary-files) will be designed and published

using the Geocentric Datum of Australia 2020 (GDA2020).

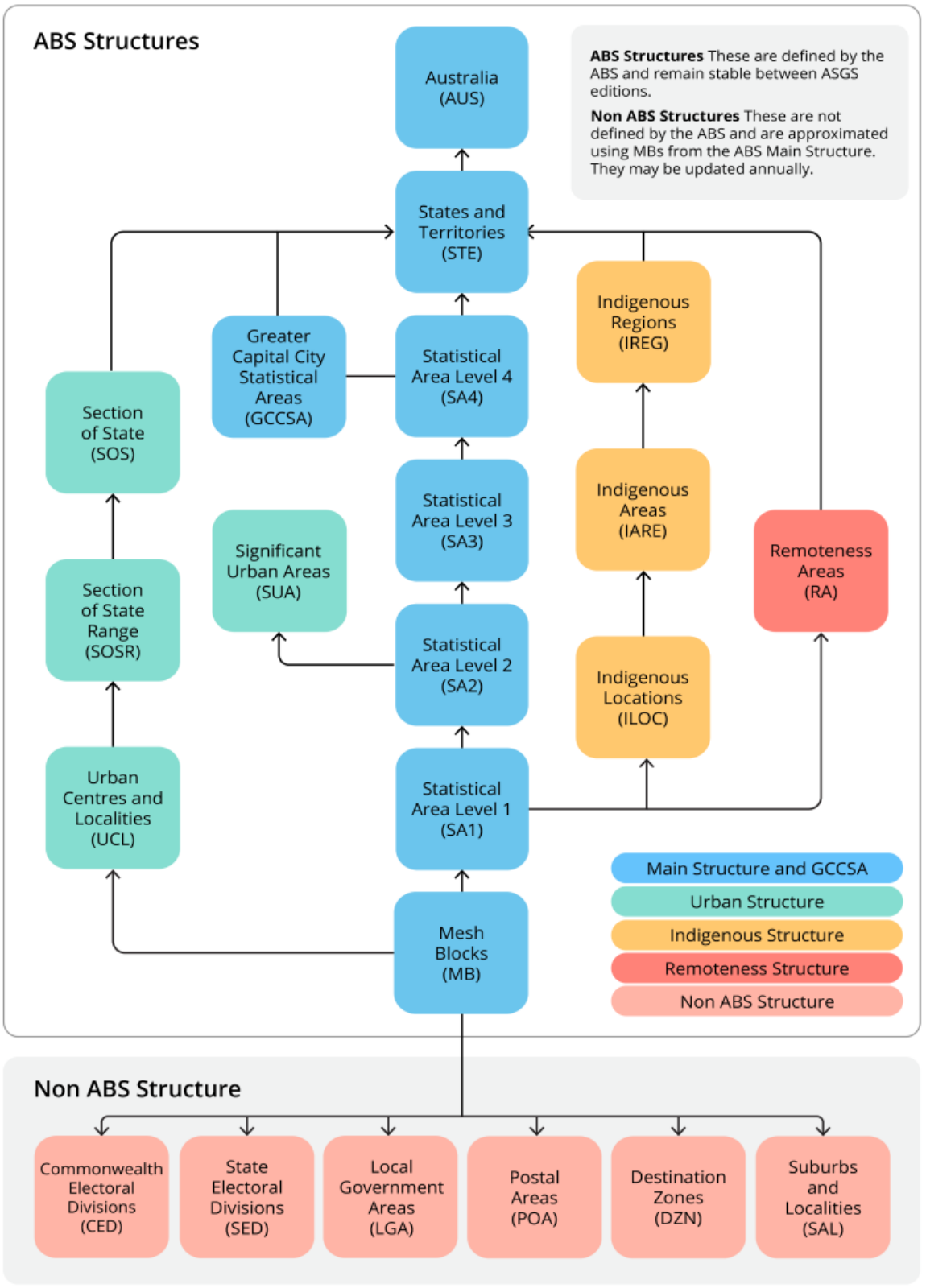
- The ASGS Web Linked Data API (also known as ‘web-links’) has been decommissioned by Geoscience Australia and will not be available for ASGS Edition 4.
- No design criteria changes are proposed for ASGS Edition 4 for Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4), Greater Capital City Statistical Areas (GCCSA), the Remoteness Structure, and the Indigenous Structure. Future ASGS consultations will inform any changes proposed for ASGS Edition 5 (2031).

ASGS Edition 4 Diagram

Provisional ASGS Edition 4 diagram, subject to change

View full screen

Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Edition 4


ABS Structures
Australia (AUS)
States and Territories (STE)
Greater Capital City Statistical Areas (GCCSA)
Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4)
Indigenous Regions (IREG)
Section of State (SOS)
Statistical Area Level 3 (SA3)
Indigenous Areas (IARE)
Remoteness Areas (RA)
Significant Urban Areas (SUA)
Section of State Range (SOSR)
Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2)
Indigenous Locations (ILOC)
Urban Centres and Localities (UCL)
Statistical Area Level 1 (SA1)
Mesh Blocks (MB)
ABS Structures These are defined by the ABS and remain stable between ASGS editions.
Non ABS Structures These are not defined by the ABS and are approximated using MBs from the ABS Main Structure. They may be updated annually.
Main Structure and GCCSA
Urban Structure
Indigenous Structure
Remoteness Structure
Non ABS Structure
Non ABS Structure
Commonwealth Electoral Divisions (CED)
State Electoral Divisions (SED)
Local Government Areas (LGA)
Postal Areas (POA)
Destination Zones (DZN)
Suburbs and Localities (SAL)

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Release schedule

ASGS Edition 4 will be progressively released from July 2026 to July 2030. Release schedule is provisional. Timings are dependent on the availability of the data inputs required to produce each structure.

ASGS Structure	Proposed release/update
Main Structure	July 2026
Indigenous Structure	October 2026
Non ABS Structure	October 2026 then annually in July 2027-2030 for some geographies
Urban Structure	October 2027
Remoteness Structure	March 2028

Consultation

From late May 2024 to early September 2024, the ABS conducted a public consultation on the ASGS via the ABS Consultation Hub.

Survey questions asked for information on how stakeholders use the ASGS, feedback on proposed changes for ASGS Edition 4, and suggestions for improvements to future editions of the ASGS.

A total of 96 submissions were received from government and non-government agencies, commercial organisations, academics, and individuals.

Further details are available from [ASGS Edition 4 - Consultation Hub (https://consult.abs.gov.au/geospatial-solutions/asgs-edition-4-consultation/)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/geospatial-solutions/asgs-edition-4-consultation/)

Changes for ASGS Edition 4

Changes planned for ASGS Edition 4 are detailed below and have been grouped by ASGS Structure.

Main Structure and Greater Capital City Statistical Areas

The Main Structure is developed by the ABS as a hierarchy of statistical geographies for releasing and analysing a broad range of statistics. Each level aggregates into the next. Greater Capital City Statistical Areas (GCCSA), while not part of the Main Structure, are geographic areas built from Statistical Areas Level 4 (SA4). The Main Structure and Greater Capital City Statistical Areas (GCCSA) remain stable between ASGS editions.

There are no major changes proposed to the design criteria for Mesh Blocks, Statistical Areas Level 1-4 (SA1, SA2, SA3, SA4), and Greater Capital City Statistical Areas (GCCSA).

Changes between ASGS editions are driven by population growth and change, especially in urban fringe areas. Mesh Blocks, SA1 and SA2 will be updated to reflect population growth and changes to infrastructure.

During consultation most respondents supported minimal changes to SA3, SA4, and Greater Capital City Statistical Areas (GCCSA) for ASGS Edition 4 and were supportive of reviewing these geographies ahead of ASGS Edition 5 (2031).

A review of the design criteria for SA4 in conjunction with Greater Capital City Statistical Areas (GCCSA), supported by research on new methodologies for creating labour markets within Australia, is planned in preparation for ASGS Edition 5. Stakeholders will have the opportunity to provide input into this review.

The Main Structure and Greater Capital City Statistical Areas (GCCSA) is planned for release in July 2026.

Indigenous Structure

The Indigenous Structure is a geographical standard for the publication and analysis of statistics.

No major changes to the Indigenous Structure are planned for ASGS Edition 4, aside from addressing population growth via changes to SA1.

Specific locations identified through user feedback and consultation responses will be reviewed as part of ASGS Edition 4 design.

During consultation 58% of respondents who used the Indigenous Structure found it fit for purpose.

The ABS is exploring options for a review of the Indigenous Structure in the lead up to ASGS Edition 5 (2031).

The Indigenous Structure is planned for release in October 2026.

Urban Structure

The ASGS classifies urban areas in several different ways to facilitate the release of a wide range of statistical data for Australian towns and cities. This structure includes Urban Centres and Localities (UCL), Section of State Range (SOSR), and Section of State (SOS), as well as Significant Urban Areas (SUA). It should be noted that these different urban classifications have been designed for the purpose of statistical analysis, and do not match official legal or administrative boundaries.

Urban Centres and Localities (UCL) will be designed using Mesh Blocks rather than SA1. The benefits include more accurately defined urban areas for statistical analysis, and the inclusion of smaller urban settlements which meet the density criteria of Urban Centres and Localities (UCL). Further information, including an Experimental Release of Mesh Block built Urban Centres and Localities (UCL) used in consultation is available from the ASGS Edition 4 consultation story map (https://statmaps.abs.gov.au/portal/apps/storymaps/stories/bbdebd380edc4eefb5486d83775ad97b) . During consultation, 79% of respondents supported adopting Mesh Blocks as the building block geography for Urban Centres and Localities (UCL) for ASGS Edition 4.

Consideration was given to the inclusion of a new Rural Residential category within Urban Centres and Localities (UCL). Consultation raised several questions and concerns, and the ABS has resolved not to introduce this category for ASGS Edition 4.

Section of State Range (SOSR) and Section of State (SOS) design criteria remain unchanged, but there will be minor alignment changes to these boundaries which are aggregated from Urban Centres and Localities (UCL). Further information on the creation of Section of State Range (SOSR) and Section of State (SOS) is available on the ASGS Edition 3 webpage (https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/australian-statistical-geography-standard-asgs-edition-3/jul2021-jun2026/significant-urban-areas-urban-centres-and-localities-section-state) .

Significant Urban Areas (SUA) will continue to be based on Urban Centres and Localities (UCL) and built from SA2. Building Urban Centres and Localities (UCL) from Mesh Blocks will result in changes to the spatial extent of Significant Urban Areas (SUA), but these changes have been assessed as minimal.

The Urban Structure is planned for release in October 2027.

Remoteness Structure

The Remoteness Structure defines Remoteness Areas (RA), and these divide Australia into five classes of remoteness based on a measure of relative access to services. Remoteness Areas (RA) are designed to provide geospatial definitions of remoteness for the publication of statistics.

No major changes are proposed to the Remoteness Structure for ASGS Edition 4, which will continue to be designed

in the same way as previous editions of the ASGS.

A review of the Remoteness Structure has been proposed for ASGS Edition 5 (2031) since the data sources used to create the Remoteness Structure in its current form, may not be available for ASGS Edition 5 and beyond.

Stakeholders will have the opportunity to provide input into any review undertaken on the Remoteness Structure.

During consultation over 70% of respondents who used Remoteness Areas (RA) found them to be fit for purpose. There were mixed responses for a review for ASGS Edition 5 (2031). Some respondents suggested improvements and the need for revision. Others wanted no change and stressed the importance of stability and time series. There was concern that the classification could be removed or changed and how this would impact organisations that use Remoteness Areas (RA).

The Remoteness Structure is planned for release in March 2028.

Non ABS Structures

Non ABS Structures are administrative regions which are not defined or maintained by the ABS.

The ABS provides a range of statistics on these geographies. They are approximated by aggregating Mesh Blocks from the Main Structure.

The changes planned for the Non ABS Structure are to remove Australian Drainage Divisions (ADD) and Tourism Regions (TR). The ABS will continue to support Australian Drainage Divisions (ADD) and Tourism Regions (TR) through correspondences (https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/australian-statistical-geography-standard-asgs-edition-3/jul2021-jun2026/access-and-downloads/correspondences) and allocation files (https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/australian-statistical-geography-standard-asgs-edition-3/jul2021-jun2026/access-and-downloads/allocation-files) .

Local Government Areas (LGA), Commonwealth Electoral Divisions (CED), State Electoral Divisions (SED), Postal Areas (POA), Destination Zones (DZN), and Suburbs and Localities (SAL) will continue to be maintained.

The Non ABS Structure is planned for release from October 2026 to July 2030. Local Government Areas will be updated annually. Commonwealth Electoral Divisions (CED) and State Electoral Divisions (SED) will also be updated annually, but only where electoral redistributions have occurred.

Digital Boundary Files and Geospatial Web Services

ASGS Edition 4 digital boundary files will continue to be available for download from the ABS website in the following formats:

- ESRI Shapefile
- OGC GeoPackage
- ArcGIS Server web services

ArcGIS Server web services support multiple common formats including JSON, GeoJSON and OGC API – Features.

The following changes to digital boundary files and geospatial web services for ASGS Edition 4 are planned:

- Digital boundary files will only be released on Geocentric Datum of Australia 2020 (GDA2020). The Geocentric Datum of Australia 1994 (GDA94) will no longer be supported. For more information about GDA2020, please refer to the Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (https://www.icsm.gov.au/gda2020/what-changing-and-why) or Geoscience Australia (https://www.ga.gov.au/scientific-topics/positioning-navigation/geodesy/datums-projections/gda2020) .

- ASGS Web Linked Data (also known as the 'linked data API' and 'web-links') will not continue for ASGS Edition 4. This is a result of the ASGS Web Linked Data API being decommissioned by Geoscience Australia at the end of June 2025. This will include removal of the attribute field "ASGS_LOCI_URI_2021" from ASGS Edition 4 boundary files and geospatial web services.

Detailed design criteria will be included in ASGS Edition 4. In the interim, please refer to ASGS Edition 3 (https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/australian-statistical-geography-standard-asgs-edition-3/latest-release) for the most up-to-date information on the ASGS.